

## May 21, 2009 - Slaughter Speaks on Need for Airline Industry Training and Standards Reform

FOR IMMEDIATE  
RELEASE

Thursday, May 21, 2009

Slaughter  
Speaks on Need for Airline Industry Training and Standards Reform

Washington, DC — Congresswoman Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Chairwoman of the House Committee on Rules, today made the following remarks during debate on H.R. 915, the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2009, legislation to authorize funding for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and modernize our nation's aging air traffic control system.

Rep. Slaughter also joined Reps. Lee and Higgins in introducing an amendment to the bill that initiates an independent, comprehensive review of all commercial airline pilot training and certification programs.

Rep. Slaughter's remarks, as prepared, follow:

I want to talk for a moment about the safety of our skies and a frightening gap in the training and oversight surrounding the commuter airline business.

One of the worst plane accidents in recent history occurred earlier this year on the night of February 12, just outside of Buffalo, New York. We lost many lives that snowy and icy night and my thoughts are with the families of all the victims.

Last week, the National Transportation Safety Board conducted hearings and we were all shocked and saddened by the testimony and the revelations.

But I am not here now to revisit the sad last moments of that crew and the 45 passengers who were lost that day. We still have many questions that must be answered and a lot of work to be done to insure that this never happens again. That is our responsibility and our mission.

I want to address the shocking conditions that many of these same pilots are facing each and every day because of the lack of rigor in the training and certification programs of commercial airline pilots.

And I hope that we can shine a light on the appalling job that the FAA has done in recent years in regulating this industry.

That's why I have joined with my friends from New York, Mr. Lee and Mr. Higgins, to introduce an amendment mandating a detailed investigation by the General Accountability Office into this gap in training.

We need to look at the number of training hours required for new pilots, how carriers update and train their pilots, and what kinds of remedial action is taken when pilots rate unsatisfactorily, among other things.

It's my belief that a thorough, top-to-bottom review of this issue is absolutely essential if we are to understand the troubled reality of the today's regional airline industry.

More importantly, if we don't get all of the facts out and into the open, we are unlikely to be able to take meaningful steps towards reform.

My intention is to work with colleagues on this issue and begin exploring legislative remedies so we can take decisive action to restore American's confidence in this system.

As I look around this chamber, I am reminded how many members of Congress must take a flight to get from their home districts to Washington.

I myself usually take two flights every week – one to get down here from Western New York and one to return home each weekend.

In the gallery I am sure there are visitors who have flown to Washington from their home towns. And every day people from coast to coast, in small cities and major hubs, catch a plane for work, to see a loved one, or simply to get away.

All of these people deserve the confidence that the pilots in the front of the plane are trained and ready for work when that aircraft pushes back from the tarmac.

It's my understanding that the salary of one of the pilots on that plane was \$16,000 a year. I can only imagine how little the attendants were paid

Those young pilots earn far less than pilots at major carriers and often struggle to make ends meet — with families, mortgages and living expenses outpacing what they can cover with their paycheck.

Worse still, we learned during the hearing that many of these pilots often fly when they are sick and when they are hungry. Can you imagine that? A pilot responsible for a plane full of men, women and children and he's sick but can't afford a day off? Or hungry and doesn't have time to stop and get lunch because he can't leave the plane?

We have also discovered that the training for some of these pilots is stunningly inadequate.

For example, the pilot in the Buffalo tragedy had apparently failed a hands-on proficiency exam not once but three times. He covered that up on his job application and the fact was not discovered until after the accident, according to the testimony we heard last week.

And even after that pilot was hired by Colgan,  
he actually failed two additional check rides but still was certified to fly.  
That's five failed tests — five too many if you ask me.

Passengers on a typical flight would be  
horrified to learn that the pilot flying their plane was a repeat failure on  
such a basic skill test.

And finally the way that these pilots are  
assigned routes — which in many cases are hundreds if not thousands of miles  
from their homes — appears to me to be a recipe for disaster. In the case of  
the Buffalo crash, both pilots had flown from  
across the country just to arrive at their route — one from Florida  
and one from Seattle.  
Both had apparently slept in a lounge — if they slept at all. Trying to rest  
in a lounge or an airplane is not safe and we should not tolerate pilots  
being treated that way.

We need to reform this system so airlines and  
pilots can escape from this insane business of criss-crossing the country to  
work in different time zones for meager pay and the hope that one day they'll  
work for a major airline.

It's my intention to buckle down on this issue

so we can put the focus less on the glamorous lifestyle of pilots and more on the quality of their training and certification and safety.

I encourage all of my colleagues to support this common-sense amendment and get some answers on the regional airline industry.

I reserve the balance of my time.

###

United States House of  
Representatives

2469 Rayburn House  
Office Building  
• Washington, DC 20515

(202) 225-3615 phone • (202)  
225-7822 fax • [www.louise.house.gov](http://www.louise.house.gov)